

FEET WASHING.

Occasion.

The Master's hour is come. He knows that he shall depart unto the Father. The passion-day is at hand. Ere the wild and sorrowful scenes of this day break upon him he spends a last evening apart with his disciples. Provision is made for the little company. An upper room is selected, furnished, and the Sacred Supper provided. In the evening he gathers with the twelve. They recline at the table to partake of the Supper. And then—during the Master's last meeting with the disciples before passion, on the eve of the dark betrayal night,—“He riseth from Supper” and washes the disciples' feet.

Jesus' Love.

The Father love of God gives the world a Savior. That Savior is upon the eve of surrendering *his life* as a redeeming sacrifice for the world. He loves the world; but he loves his own infinitely more with a love they cannot yet understand. And now he gives them the *last proof* of love before his death in washing their feet. (V. 1)

Jesus Knowing.

But note that in the act of this proof, the supremest act of humiliation and service, he never for a moment lost the consciousness of his majesty and Divine dignity. *Jesus knows.* The words introducing the great Commission in Matt. 28 : 19, do not surpass in sweep of authority these in verse 3, which preface the feet washing. Jesus, “knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he came forth from God, and goeth unto God,” is, in this moment of the supremest consciousness of the mystery of his mission into the world, about to—“*to wash the disciples' feet.*” What can this all mean? Surely at such a moment he is expected *to do some great thing*, to give some splendid manifestation of his power, or to reveal his matchless glory. “Jesus knowing”—what shall we not await in rapturous expectancy? “Jesus knowing”—and then he washes the disciples' feet teaching us by definite example and positive command the sublimest lessons of the Christian life. Oh, for a spiritual consciousness coming out of great prayer and a vision of God to do as the Master gave example!

Jesus' Example.

And now Jesus conscious of the very fulness and glory of his Messianic power rises from the supper, lays aside his garments, girds himself with a towel, pours water into a basin, and begins to wash the disciples' feet. V. 4, 5. What an example! He *gives* the example. Did Jesus Christ ever copy an example? *Never.* He *gives* but never *copies*, never *imitates*, never has need to take ought of word or example back. His own claim is “For I have given you an example.” (V. 15) He not only gives the doctrine, but he exemplifies it. He prefaces a deep obligation (V. 14) and what would otherwise be an abstract command with a splendid, yet simple, example. The Master's example, followed in the spirit of the Master, is the disciple's pledge of blessedness. (V. 17) Oh, how much of blessedness we lose, how much that the world sorely needs, is lost, because we refuse to obey our Master!

Jesus and Peter.

a. *Peter's Protest.* “So he cometh to Simon Peter,”—comes to wash his feet. In astonishment he asks, “Lord, dost thou wash *my* feet?” “*Thou*”—“*my*,” on these words is the emphasis. Peter sees only the fact of Christ's act. It is the act of a servant, not the Lord, and Peter protests. He can not permit his feet to be thus washed. (V. 6)

b. *Now and Hereafter.* Jesus knows the disciple's difficulty, that he does not understand the Master's act. He must lead Peter to understand—away from the fact to the thing signified. “What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt understand hereafter.” *Do the will*—then you *shall know*, the secret of the teaching. (See John 7 : 17.) Accept the symbol and the grace signified will well up in your heart afterward. V. 7.

c. *Peter's Refusal.* But the man refuses to wait that he may learn hereafter, and so refuses Jesus' washing. “Never, while time lasts, shalt thou wash *my* feet.” He still thinks only of the accustomed feet washing of the day; while the new and deeply significant act of Jesus and the glorious light of its spiritual lessons were yet above his consciousness. Will the disciple rise to the Master's consciousness? Yes, if he submits he shall know. Shall *we* also understand? Yes, when no longer living in open refusal but in humble obedience *we do as the Master asks* (Vs. 14, 15) then shall the external act, which occasions but wonder now, becomes a precious emblem of a work of Grace, a visible symbol of an unseen but spiritual blessedness.

d. *Jesus' Answer.* Peter's strong refusal brings from Jesus a strong reply. “If I wash thee not thou has no part with me.” Jesus had just said “Let me do this thing now and you will afterward learn its meaning” and Peter had positively refused. He must be brought to himself,—may we profit by his experience! Jesus, without a word, strips his act of its external, servile appearance and exalts it to the highest plane of spiritual life,—that of fellowship and

vital union with Christ.

e. *Peter begins to Understand.* “No part with thee!” Now it means something to Peter. In his fear lest he lose all, he cries, “Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.” Tho he does not fully understand he is more than willing to submit. The Master knows and can be trusted. He thinks *we* ought to wash one another's feet. Why not loyally obey? The Master ought to know best what we ought to do, and he says we ought to do this. Are we ready to begin to understand?

Jesus and Cleansing.

Read Vs. 10 and 11. But to Peter's exclamation Jesus says, No. For one who has bathed (the entire body;) needs nothing further than to wash his feet (which are soiled again by the road; rather is he (except as to the necessary cleansing of his feet) clean in his entire body. Washing, all thru the Bible, is a symbol of moral purification. So the sacred writers speak of the cleansing of the heart, of the soul's riddance of all sins when first accepted by Christ as “a washing away of sins in baptism” (Acts 22 : 16) or as being accomplished “thru the washing of regeneration.” Titus 3 : 5 Tho the *Word* is the purifying element (John 5 : 3,) the ground of the soul's cleansing, its efficacious and gracious effect is in the first instance wrought thru and symbolized by the act of baptism and in the second set forth under the emblematic feet washing.

“Ye are clean.” For they had been (“bathed”) purified and attained unto living fellowship with him. They no more needed the “bath of regeneration.” They had need only to wash their feet as having become soiled along life's roadway. The bathing is indicative of the greater, and single, purification of the soul,—the foot-washing of the minor, yet necessary, washing of the pilgrim journeying heavenward.

“But not all.” This must forever silence the objection that Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet had reference to the outward cleansing of the feet. Now, if not before, Peter and his brethren must have understood Christ's act as having a deep and intense spiritual signification. Since Judas is not (bathed) clean how vain the feet washing! It can never make him clean!

Jesus the Master.

After the act is done, and the place resumed at the supper Jesus reminds the disciples of their true relation to him. They confessed him as Master (or Teacher.) Jesus says they are right. By virtue of his authority as Master and Lord he washed their feet. By virtue of that same authority he lays an obligation upon the disciples. If the Master may not command who may? Never was he more in earnest, more positive, and withal so simple and explicit in precept and example as now.

Jesus and Duty.

Read Vs. 14 and 15. If the great Teacher washed the disciples' feet, and he did, we are under an obligation enjoined by him to wash one another's feet. The Lord's “ought” can not be gainsaid. In no other place is it vitiated. As Jesus had done his disciples “ought” to be willing to do without question. To do something else, anything else, will not satisfy the Lord's specific words “Ye also ought to wash one another's feet.” Jesus' example is all a loyal disciple needs plead in defense of washing his brother's feet. “For I have given you an example, That ye also should do as I have done to you.” “Ought” and “should” are not words to be trifled with. They enjoin, they obligate, they involve moral responsibility.

Dr. Parker of London truly says on this verse: “Christ's method did not admit of debate. It is not a theory, it was an argument which no ingenuity could ever impair. It was practicable; the Lord and Master had done it. It was worth doing, or he who never trifled with life would not have set the example. And Jesus adds, “If ye know these things blessed are ye if you do them.”

An Act of Obedience.

In perpetuating the observance of feet washing we yield obedience to the divine will as expressed in the explicit command of the Savior. Jesus is our Lord and Master. It is His to command, ours to obey. The spirit of submission seeks not its own but renders unquestioned obedience to the will of God. The true child of God never asks whether this thing or that is essential, whether this or that *must* be done, but rather, what would the Master have me do, what is *His* will, what does *He* command. To one in whose heart is the spirit of obedience this determines everything. “To obey is better than sacrifice.”

Humility and Service.

Humility and service are beautifully and symbolically set forth in the ordinance of feet washing. In the life of Jesus these two elements were inseparable, and as they were in the life of Jesus so they should be, they *must* be in the life of the Christ-like man. To the pagan mind the word humility had no meaning except contemptible meanness. By his life and example Jesus gave the word a new meaning, making it one of the Christian graces. The Christian ideal demands humility, not as an end, but as a form of service. Separated from the idea of service it is robbed of its beauty. To stoop that we may serve is true humility, and in the act of feet washing we have a symbol of that grand humility with which Jesus stooped to serve humanity. When your brother's feet are caught in the defilements of the ways of this world, the Christ-man stoops in true humility and sympathy that he may help him cleanse his walk and conversation.